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# LINCOLN

## AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

BY  
MAJOR-GENERAL FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. V.

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# LINCOLN AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

By Major-General Francis V. Greene, U. S. V.



AMONG the manifold duties devolving upon Lincoln during the four years of his Presidency none exceeded in importance the exercise of his constitutional functions as Commander-in-Chief of the army; for manifestly upon the success of the armed forces in the field depended the issue of the momentous political questions at stake. It is the purpose of this article to examine the manner in which Lincoln performed these military functions, and to venture an opinion upon it; partly from the technical military stand-point, and partly from the larger, wider stand-point of political expediency; and to support this opinion by Lincoln's own words, penned by his own hand, and showing in a most interesting manner the working of his brain.

For various reasons it was not necessary for him to devote personal attention to the details of the other departments; but the operations of the army were in Lincoln's thoughts every waking hour for 1502 long days. Scarcely a day passed that he did not visit the War Department or the houses of McClellan or Halleck; and hardly, if ever, a day that Stanton or Halleck did not visit the White House. The responsibility of military success or failure was on Lincoln, and he knew it. There were the Secretary of War, the General-in-Chief, the generals in the field, the Committee on the Conduct of the War, with virile men like Ben Wade and Zach Chandler as members, but the final arbiter was Lincoln.

How, then, did he perform the duties of his military leadership, wisely or unwisely? Was his military judgment sound or defective? Let the facts, and his own words, speak for themselves.

Little need be said of his brief service in the Black Hawk War of 1832, when, at the age of twenty-three, he served first as captain of a company of mounted volunteers, and afterward, when this company was disbanded, as a private in Captain Iles's company until the close of the war. It was a hunting expedition rather than a military

campaign. Lincoln was elected captain, by a large majority, because he had "the necessary muscles and fighting pluck to whip any rough in his company." He maintained discipline by his strong right arm, and any man who could down him in a fair and square fight with his fists was welcome to the captaincy. But none could. Among the many contrasts in Lincoln's career perhaps none is more striking than that between his position as a captain and private in the motley collection of rough frontiersmen with whom he served in 1832, and his position as Commander-in-Chief of nearly 1,000,000 veteran soldiers in 1864.

He had been President less than twenty-four hours when, on the morning of March 5, he learned the precarious situation at Fort Sumter, then not publicly known. He at once called on General Scott for reports and advice, and on March 12 Scott stated in writing: "It is, therefore, my opinion and advice that Major Anderson be instructed to evacuate the fort . . . and embark with his command for New York." Scott had served with distinction in the War of 1812, had conducted a brilliant campaign resulting in the capture of the City of Mexico, was now the senior officer in the army, and the highest military authority in the land. Lincoln instantly and wisely overruled him. For various reasons, stated in his message to Congress of July 14, "this could not be allowed." Lincoln's orders were exactly the opposite, to organize an expedition for the relief of Fort Sumter; and no one worked more loyally to carry them out than General Scott. A few days later it was a question of Fort Pickens in Florida. Scott recommended that it be evacuated. Lincoln sought other advice, reached his decision that Fort Pickens should be re-enforced, and sent this order to Scott on Sunday, March 31: "Tell him that I wish this thing done, and not to let it fail unless he can show that I have refused him something he asked for as necessary." Scott, on receiving the order, said in his sententious man-

By transfer

The White House

March 3rd, 1913

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ner, "Sir, the great Frederick used to say, 'When the King commands, all things are possible.' It shall be done." It was done; and this fort never passed out of possession of the United States. The expedition to Fort Sumter failed, but through no fault of Lincoln.

In the Bull Run campaign Lincoln again exercised his full authority. On June 29 he received Scott's report, considered it, consulted with his cabinet, and made his decision. Scott advised that no forward movement be made until autumn and that the advance be then made down the Mississippi. Lincoln overruled him and directed that an advance be made immediately in Virginia. Scott, always the loyal subordinate, then submitted, with his approval, the plan which McDowell had prepared, and Lincoln ordered it to be carried out. We have General Sherman's word for it that "it was one of the best planned battles of the war, but one of the worst fought."

During the days which followed the disaster Lincoln gave his entire thought to the military problem. Scott and McClellan had both submitted large plans of campaigns, beginning on the Potomac or the Ohio and terminating on the Gulf of Mexico, but they were crude and undigested, and apparently made little impression on Lincoln's mind. By concentrated study and apparently with but little assistance from his technical advisers, he evolved these ideas and wrote them out in his own hand.

"JULY 23, 1861

"1. Let the plan for making the blockade effective be pushed forward with all possible despatch.

"2. Let the volunteer forces at Fort Monroe and vicinity, under General Butler, be constantly drilled, disciplined, and instructed without more for the present.

"3. Let Baltimore be held, as now, with a gentle but firm and certain hand.

"4. Let the force now under Patterson or Banks be strengthened and made secure in its position.

"5. Let the forces in western Virginia act till further orders, according to instructions or orders from General McClellan.

"6. General Fremont push forward his

organization and operations in the West as rapidly as possible, giving special attention to Missouri.

"7. Let the forces late before Manassas, except the three months' men, be reorganized as rapidly as possible in their camps here and about Arlington.

"8. Let the three months' forces who decline to enter the longer service be discharged as rapidly as circumstances will permit.

"9. Let the new volunteer forces be brought forward as fast as possible; and especially into the camps on the two sides of the river here.

"JULY 27, 1861

"When the foregoing shall have been substantially attended to:

"1. Let Manassas Junction (or some point on one or other of the railroads near it) and Strasburg be seized, and permanently held, with an open line from Washington to Manassas, and an open line from Harper's Ferry to Strasburg—the military men to find the way of doing these.

"2. This done, a joint movement from Cairo on Memphis; and from Cincinnati to east Tennessee."

No professional soldier or writer could state more precisely the military situation then existing or propose a sounder military plan. Lincoln had that faculty of intense application and clear insight, so rare that we call it genius; and he applied it as successfully to military affairs as to politics, notwithstanding the fact that he was, by instinct, a man of peace, and by training a lawyer, and that military problems never engaged his attention until he was fifty-two years old.

His memorandum of July 23 and 27, 1861, was the first definite and coherent plan for the prosecution of the war. It emanated from his own mind and not from that of any of his generals. The instrumentality necessary to carry it into effect—an organized, disciplined army with competent commanding officers—did not then exist. Both the army and the commanders had to be evolved as the war progressed. The plan was interrupted and delayed, now by McClellan's unsuccessful movement by the Peninsula, now by the incapacity of Halleck on the Tennessee,

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and Pope in Virginia in 1862, and again in 1862 and 1863 by inability to find the competent man to command the Army of the Potomac and by the brilliant campaigns of Lee and his great lieutenant Jackson. But Lincoln never swerved from his memorandum of July 27, 1861. He yielded his own judgment at times to that of professional soldiers. But finally he found in Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan the long-sought military commanders, competent for their tasks; and then so much of his plan as remained unexecuted was carried into effect.

Immediately after Bull Run McClellan was placed in command of the Army of the Potomac, Scott remaining as general-in-chief until October when he retired and McClellan succeeded him in that office. For the next year, until McClellan was finally relieved of all active military duty, there was an incessant exchange of views between Lincoln and McClellan in the form of personal interviews, letters, orders, and reports. On August 4 McClellan submitted his report calling for a main army of 275,000 men under his own command. In this he says: "I propose, with the force which I have requested, not only to drive the enemy out of Virginia and occupy Richmond, but to occupy Charleston, Savannah, Montgomery, Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans; in other words, to move into the heart of the enemy's country and crush the rebellion in its very heart." To Lincoln's more practical mind the thing to do was to attack and defeat the Confederate Army, facing them about twenty miles from Washington. Troops were coming forward at the rate of a regiment a day, and Lincoln argued that we had the greater number of men and that the enemy was at least no better organized, equipped, and drilled than we were. McClellan argued that the enemy had superior numbers (a complete error, as the records now plainly show) and that no movement could be made until his army was more fully (ever *more* fully) equipped. Autumn and early winter passed and Lincoln could get nothing done. He hesitated to impose his own views upon professional soldiers, but finally he made his decision, and on January 27 issued a formal and peremptory order that "the 22d day of February, 1862, be the day for a general

forward movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces; . . . that especially . . . the Army of the Potomac be ready to move on that day. . . ." A few days later he followed this with a specific order to McClellan to seize and occupy a point on the railroad near Manassas Junction; which, of course, involved an attack on Johnston's army. The official records show that the Army of the Potomac numbered on December 31, 1861, 183,207 officers and men "*present for duty*," and that on the same day Johnston's *aggregate present* was 63,409; and that about the time that Lincoln issued his order Johnston was called to Richmond and instructed to withdraw his army from Manassas.

But McClellan instead of obeying the order asked for its suspension, and for further argument; and in the course of the argument Lincoln wrote this letter to McClellan on February 3, "You and I have distinct and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac—yours to be down the Chesapeake, up the Rappahannock to Urbana, and across land to the terminus of the railroad on the York River; mine to move directly to a point on the railroads south-west of Manassas." McClellan replied on the same day in a letter of nearly four thousand words. It made no direct answer to Lincoln's questions, but it contained these two sentences—"It is by no means certain that we can beat them at Manassas. On the other line, I regard success as certain by all the chances of war." Lincoln was not convinced, but he had no general of proved capacity to put in McClellan's place and he hesitated to impose arbitrarily on McClellan a plan which McClellan so obstinately opposed. The result was the disastrous Peninsular campaign.

Only a brief reference need be made to McClellan's insubordinate despatch of June 28, 1862, when, in the midst of defeats, he said to Stanton, "the Government has not sustained this army. . . . I owe no thanks to you or to any other persons in Washington. You have done your best to sacrifice this army."

It would have been well for the discipline of every man then in uniform, high and low, and would probably have saved many a life and shortened the war, if Lincoln had

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instantly telegraphed back placing McClellan in close arrest and assigning any one of his corps commanders to command the army. But that was not Lincoln's way. Instant decision was not his habit. His mental processes were slow—though sure. And thought of personal insult never influenced him. On one occasion he went to McClellan's house and waited several hours to see him, only to have McClellan come in and go to bed without seeing the President at all. On another occasion, when McClellan failed to keep an appointment at the White House, and the others, who had come, expressed their impatience at McClellan's delay, Lincoln only remarked: "Never mind; I will hold McClellan's horse, if he will only bring us success."

Such patience, such tolerance, such sacrifice of self to anything that will help accomplish a supremely important result are the marks of a great soul, but not of a great soldier. His military perceptions were more accurate than those of any of his generals in independent command, except Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and possibly Thomas. But his self-effacement, his diffidence, his doubt whether the country would sustain him, if he peremptorily asserted his opinions against those of his professional military subordinates, left the army with two heads or three heads or no head at all until the really efficient man was found in Grant. From this confusion and lack of unity of command came the indecisive, inconclusive movements and battles of the Army of the Potomac during the interval between McClellan's defeats on the Peninsula in 1862 and Grant's victories in the Wilderness in 1864.

In the effort to find a man equal to the task of commanding the Eastern Army and of coping with Lee and Jackson, Lincoln brought from the West two generals who had had some measure of success there; and in July, 1862, Halleck was assigned as general-in-chief, in Washington, and Pope to command the Army of Virginia. Neither succeeded. Halleck was never more than an indifferent chief of staff to Lincoln, disliked and distrusted by all the generals in the field, and incapable of evolving and carrying on a definite plan of campaign. Pope was speedily driven back to Washington by the direct road and

there met McClellan's army arriving from the Peninsula. Lincoln again turned to McClellan, who, in less than three weeks of September, 1862, brought Lee's invasion to a halt and fought a desperate battle with him at Antietam—the most valuable and effective eighteen days of McClellan's entire service. But then McClellan stopped, and Lincoln began again the weary argument in favor of attack. After a personal visit to the army at the beginning of October, six weeks after the battle, he sent through Halleck a peremptory order to attack Lee, and as this produced no effect, Lincoln wrote McClellan a letter on October 13 which shows a marvellously accurate comprehension of the military situation at that time.

"Are you not overcautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing? Should you not claim to be at least his equal in prowess, and act upon the claim? As I understand, you telegraphed General Halleck that you cannot subsist your army at Winchester unless the railroad from Harper's Ferry to that point be put in working order. But the enemy does now subsist his army at Winchester, at a distance nearly twice as great as you would have to do without the railroad last named. He now waggons from Culpeper Court House, which is just about twice as far as you would have to do from Harper's Ferry. He is certainly not more than half as well provided with waggons as you are. . . . Again, one of the standard maxims of war, as you know, is to 'operate upon the enemy's communications without exposing your own.' You seem to act as if this applies against you, but cannot apply it in your favor. Change positions with the enemy, and think you not he would break your communication with Richmond in twenty-four hours? . . . You are now nearer Richmond than the enemy is by the route you can and he must take. Why can you not reach there before him, unless you admit that he is more than your equal on a march? His route is the arc of a circle, while yours is the chord. The roads are as good on yours as on his. . . . If he should move northward, I would follow him closely, holding his communications. If he should prevent our seizing his communications and move toward Richmond, I would press closely to him, fight him, if a favorable

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opportunity should present, and at least try to beat him to Richmond on the inside track. I say 'Try'; if we never try, we shall never succeed. . . . If we cannot beat him when he bears the wastage of coming to us, we never can when we bear the wastage of going to him. . . . As we must beat him somewhere or fail finally, we can do it, if at all, easier near to us than far away. . . . It is all easy if our troops march as well as the enemy, and it is unmanly to say that they cannot do it." Unfortunately, the letter concludes with the sentence, "This letter is in no sense an order."

As in July, 1861, so now again in October, 1862, Lincoln thus elucidated the military principles applicable to the situation as it then existed in Virginia. Fifty-six days had elapsed since the battle of Antietam. It was, however, thirteen days longer before McClellan began to cross the Potomac and five days additional before he finished crossing. Lincoln then decided that "if McClellan should permit Lee to cross the Blue Ridge and place himself between Richmond and the Army of the Potomac he would remove him from command." It was a fair test of McClellan's generalship as compared with Lee's. Within four days after McClellan crossed the Potomac, Lee had come through the passes of the Blue Ridge and planted himself squarely in McClellan's path at Culpeper. McClellan was forthwith removed.

In his intercourse with McClellan between July, 1861, and November, 1862, Lincoln constantly exhibited weakness in allowing McClellan to write him insubordinate letters, and in allowing him to act on plans which Lincoln did not approve, and in allowing him to remain inactive when every consideration, military as well as political, required vigorous action—such action as was shown by Grant and Sherman and Sheridan whenever they were in independent command. Whether such weakness on Lincoln's part was justifiable or otherwise is a large question, quite apart from the purpose of this article, which is to show the accuracy of Lincoln's judgment on purely military questions.

During the short and disastrous period of Burnside's command of the Army of the Potomac, Lincoln exercised a less active control. Burnside's plans did not impress

him favorably, but he seemed to desire to give Burnside a chance to prove his capacity. When he proved the opposite Lincoln relieved him. He chose for his successor the man who had most bitterly criticised Burnside—Hooker—and he wrote Hooker a memorable letter, censuring him for his criticisms of Burnside, expressing confidence in his skill, and assuring him of his support. On the 11th of April Hooker submitted his plan. Lincoln's comment was as follows, "My opinion is that, just now, with the enemy directly ahead of us there is no eligible route for us into Richmond; and consequently a question of preference between the Rappahannock route and the James River route is a contest about nothing. Hence our prime object is the enemy's army in front of us, and is not with or about Richmond at all, unless it be incidental to the main object." He advised against "attacking him in his intrenchments," but preferred to "harass and menace him" so that he could "have no leisure nor safety in sending away detachments"; but "if he weakens himself, then pitch into him."

Hooker's plan for Chancellorsville was a good one, and up to a certain point well executed. Then Hooker failed. Had Jackson or Sheridan had the execution of it, it would probably have resulted in a brilliant success. Before Hooker could make plans for another offensive movement Lee took the offensive, in the Gettysburg campaign. Hooker proposed to attack his rear, first at Fredericksburg and later at Harper's Ferry. Lincoln disapproved both; the first in his oft-quoted letter in which he expressed a well-known military maxim—against having an army divided by a non-fordable river—by his quaint illustration of "an ox jumped half-way over a fence and liable to be torn by dogs, front and rear, without a fair chance to gore one way or kick another." In the interval Hooker proposed to march to Richmond, which Lee's movement to the Shenandoah Valley had left unguarded. Tempting as this was, Lincoln's clear insight discarded it and he answered, June 10, "I think Lee's army, and not Richmond, is your sure objective point . . . follow on his flank and on his inside track, shortening your lines while he lengthens his; fight him, too, when opportunity offers."

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Hooker followed these instructions, and on the 27th of June approached the passes of South Mountain, intending to attack Lee's rear, in the vicinity of the ground where McClellan had fought the battle of Antietam the previous year. He telegraphed Halleck asking that the troops which garrisoned Harper's Ferry, about 10,000 men, be placed under his orders. Halleck refused consent, and Hooker immediately asked to be relieved. Meade was assigned to command the Army of the Potomac in his place.

In the telegram assigning Meade to command, Halleck said, "Harper's Ferry and its garrison are under your direct orders," thus giving Meade 10,000 men which the day before he had refused to give to Hooker. Meade was so surprised that he at once telegraphed Halleck, "Am I permitted to withdraw a portion of the garrison of Harper's Ferry?" and within three hours received the reply, "The garrison at Harper's Ferry is under your orders." Meade forthwith ordered its withdrawal.

In this strange circumstance it does not appear that Lincoln had any part, though it is doubtful if Halleck acted without protecting himself by the President's approval—perhaps obtained without full explanation. That it is impossible for an army to be successfully commanded in such manner does not admit of doubt. Lincoln was one day issuing orders through Halleck and the next day writing letters direct to Hooker, who in turn addressed his replies to the President. Hooker believed that Halleck deliberately intended to destroy his military reputation; and Halleck said that Hooker ignored him and that all he knew about the Army of the Potomac was what he could learn from the President. Lincoln, considered as a military man, is least satisfactory from the stand-point of discipline. Theoretically he understood its value, but practically he did not apply it, particularly in the higher ranks. If he could have given his whole mind to the military problem, either in the field or at Washington, studied it until he mastered it as he mastered every problem to which he gave his undivided attention, and issued positive instructions in order to give effect to his opinions, he would have made short work of such relations as existed between

Halleck and Hooker, or of such inaction as followed after Antietam and after Gettysburg. But he had always other problems on hand in addition to the military problem, and at this particular time, in midsummer of 1863, his mind was filled with two subjects of transcendent importance. One of them was the Emancipation Proclamation, which, resolved on as a thank offering for Antietam, had been issued September 22, 1862, confirmed January 1, 1863, and now was just taking full effect. Would the country sustain him? It seems hard to realize now that in 1863 the people of the North were so evenly divided on that question. The other subject was the resistance to the draft (authorized by the law of March 3, 1863), already ominous and soon to take the form of horrible riots in New York. Well might his tired brain refuse to penetrate the essential features of the military situation, when the highest political questions—his very own problems—absorbed the last drop of its energy.

Whatever the cause, it is noticeable that from the time Lincoln ordered the removal of McClellan in November, 1862, until just after the battle of Gettysburg in July, 1863, Lincoln gave no positive orders. He corresponded with the generals, discussed military questions with them, and gave his opinions freely, but always qualified them with some such remark as, "This is a suggestion, not an order," "I suggest this plan, incompetent as I may be," "I leave this to the military men," and so on. Just after Gettysburg he believed that Lee's army could be practically destroyed before it crossed the Potomac, and he caused the most vigorous orders to be sent to Meade. Had Lincoln written these orders himself, in his own clear and vigorous style, quite possibly they would have spurred Meade to such exertions as would have caused the desired result—although Meade was hardly cast in heroic mould. But interpreted through Halleck they have a bombastic, hysterical sound which perhaps caused Meade to pay so little attention to them. July 7, "Push forward and fight Lee before he can cross the Potomac." July 8, "My only fear now is that the enemy may escape by crossing the river." July 9, "Do not be influenced by any despatch from here against your judg-

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ment. Regard them as suggestions only."

July 10, "I think it will be best for you to postpone a general battle until you can concentrate your forces." July 10, "Beware of partial combats. Bring up and hurl upon the enemy all your forces, good and bad." July 13, "Act upon your own judgment and make your generals execute your orders. Call no council of war. It is proverbial that councils of war never fight." July 14, "I need hardly say to you that the escape of Lee's army without another battle has caused great dissatisfaction in the mind of the President."

When Meade received the telegram of July 14 he promptly asked to be relieved of the command; this was declined and a telegram sent to Meade expressing thanks for what he had done, and using the word "disappointment," in place of "dissatisfaction," to express the President's feeling in regard to the escape of Lee's army.

Lincoln was indeed grievously disappointed; yet it must be acknowledged that the course he had pursued during the previous six months had not been such as to breed commanders in the Army of the Potomac fit to cope with Robert E. Lee. To have a nominal general-in-chief and yet to carry on a correspondence with his subordinates without his knowledge; to require the general in the field to submit his plans and then to send a reply expressing approval or disapproval of it, but ending with the remark—repeated so often as to become almost a formula—"this is a suggestion only, not an order"—this is not the way in which military operations are successfully conducted.

In the West Lincoln had practically the same difficulties on military questions as in the East. He first assigned Fremont to command at St. Louis and McClellan at Cincinnati; but Fremont soon showed insubordination and a desire to settle the slavery question on his own account, and was superseded by Halleck; and when McClellan was brought to Washington, Buell took his place. Lincoln had clear, definite plans in his mind, as shown by his memorandum of July 27, "a joint movement from Cairo on Memphis and from Cincinnati on east Tennessee." There were good military reasons in support of both, for one would cut the Confederacy

in two along the line of the Mississippi, and the other would break the railroad communications of the Confederates between Chattanooga and Virginia. There were, moreover, political considerations of an imperative character in favor of supporting the Unionists of east Tennessee and possibly saving that State and Kentucky and the western part of Virginia for the Union.

The autumn passed with nothing done, and on January 1, 1862, Lincoln sent telegrams and letters to Halleck and to Buell asking that they act in concert, Halleck against Columbus, on the Mississippi, and Buell against Cumberland Gap in east Tennessee. Halleck replied, stating that "it would be madness to attempt anything serious" with the force at his command, and that the President's plan was based on a "strategic error." On receiving this, Lincoln wrote on the back of it this melancholy endorsement, "It is exceedingly discouraging. As everywhere, nothing can be done." On January 4 Lincoln again telegraphed Buell about east Tennessee, "Please tell me the progress and condition of the movement in that direction. Answer." Buell replied, "I hope to inaugurate it soon. . . . While my preparations have had this movement constantly in view . . . my judgment has from the first been decidedly against it." To which, on January 6, Lincoln answered: "Your despatch . . . disappoints and distresses me. I have shown it to General McClellan who says he will write you to-day. I am not competent to criticise your views, and therefore what I offer is in justification of myself. Of the two I would rather have a point on the railroad south of Cumberland Gap than Nashville. First, because it cuts a great artery of the enemy's communication, which Nashville does not; and secondly, because it is in the midst of loyal people who would rally around it, while Nashville is not. Again, I cannot see why the movement in east Tennessee would not be a diversion in your favor rather than a disadvantage, assuming that a movement toward Nashville is the main object. But my distress is that our friends in east Tennessee are being hanged and driven to despair, and even now, I fear, are thinking of taking rebel arms for the sake of personal protection. . . . I do not intend this to be an order in any sense, but merely, as intimated

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before, to show you the grounds of my anxiety."

This letter was sent by mail, but the following day, January 7, Lincoln's feeling on the subject being so intense, he telegraphed Buell to name a day when he could move southward in concert with Halleck, adding, "Delay is ruining us and it is indispensable for me to have something definite." Simultaneously a triangular correspondence by wire and mail was passing between McClellan, General-in-Chief, at Washington, and Halleck and Buell; as a result of which Halleck sent orders on January 6 to Grant, then commanding the district at Cairo, to "make a demonstration in force" in the direction of Forts Henry and Donelson, but "be very careful," the order said, "to avoid a battle. We are not ready for that." Grant received the order on the 8th and began the movement on the 9th; he made his "demonstration," the men being out for more than a week, "splashing through the mud, snow, and rain," and then brought his troops back to Cairo. He asked permission to go to St. Louis on military business, and on arriving there laid before Halleck a plan for the capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. It was coldly received, and Grant returned to Cairo, as he says, "very much crestfallen." But a few days later, January 28, he ventured to send this telegram to Halleck, "With permission, I will take Fort Henry, on the Tennessee, and establish and hold a large camp there." Flag-Officer Foote, commanding the gun-boats on the river, backed him up with a similar despatch. Not being snubbed again, as he feared, on the following day, January 29, he sent a longer telegram explaining his plan more in detail. On the 30th Halleck granted his consent by wire and sent instructions by mail. Grant received them on February 1. He sprang forward like a dog let out of leash. His troops moved on the 2nd, and, with the co-operation of Foote's gun-boats, took Fort Henry on the 6th and Fort Donelson on the 16th, with the "unconditional surrender" of 15,000 Confederate soldiers, the capture of forty pieces of artillery and a large amount of stores, horses, mules, and other property. The Confederate line of defence, from Columbus to Bowling Green, having been pierced, the whole line was promptly abandoned and a new line taken up from

Memphis to Chattanooga, one hundred and fifty miles to the south.

Now, what does all this prove? It seems to me to prove, beyond dispute, that on the military questions at issue on the opening of military operations in the West, Lincoln was right and his generals, McClellan, Halleck, and Buell, were wrong.

First, Lincoln insisted on a movement southward by Halleck and Buell. Both said it could not be done because they had not enough troops, because such troops as they had were not properly equipped, drilled, and disciplined, because they had not enough arms, and because the roads were so bad. Grant proved he had enough troops for the work required, that the enemy was at least as badly off as ourselves in equipment, drill, discipline, and arms, and that, bad as the roads were, they were not bad enough to prevent active military operations. That these things could be done was what Lincoln argued, over and over, in letters and telegrams to McClellan and Meade in the East, and to Halleck and Buell in the West. They always said "No"; but the instant Grant got permission to try, he showed that the answer should have been "Yes."

Second, Halleck told Lincoln and McClellan that Lincoln's plan was "bad strategy," McClellan was in doubt about it, and Buell's judgment was "decidedly against it." Grant showed that one part of it, the movement from Cairo toward Memphis, could be carried out with brilliant success, inflicting on the enemy his first defeat in the war, and breaking up his first line of defence in the West; and it must be remembered that the whole movement had its origin in Lincoln's letter and telegram to Halleck of January 1.

Third. As to the second part of it, the movement through Cumberland Gap to cut the railroad from Virginia and turn the enemy's flank, it was just such a movement as Lee and Jackson would have delighted in; and if intrusted to a competent commander, such as Sherman, there is no reason to doubt that it would have been a great success—as important as the capture of Fort Donelson, in a military sense, and even more important in a political sense. But Buell would not heed the President's suggestions. A force was sent against Cumberland Gap, but too small to accom-



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plish anything permanent; and it was not until eighteen months later, in September, 1863, that an adequate force under Burnside carried the passes in the Cumberland Mountains and occupied Knoxville and other points in east Tennessee.

If Lincoln had placed Grant in command of the Western armies in July, 1862, when Halleck was made general-in-chief, instead of in October, 1863, it would probably have shortened the war by a year. But Halleck had prejudiced Lincoln against Grant. Instead of giving Grant full credit for Donelson, Halleck began intimating in his despatches to Washington that Grant had been guilty of disobedience of orders, absence from his command, etc. He was authorized at once to put Grant in arrest, but when Halleck looked into the matter, he found that he was mistaken, and said so to Grant and also to the Adjutant-General in Washington. Nevertheless, immediately after the battle of Shiloh, when Halleck came from St. Louis to take personal command in the field, Grant was made "Second-in-command"—with no duties—and remained in that position so long as Halleck was in the West. When Halleck left for the East his command was split up into three independent armies, those of the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi, under Grant, Buell, and Rosecrans; and these acted independently until after Grant had taken Vicksburg and Rosecrans had been defeated at Chickamauga more than a year later. Then everything in the West was put under Grant, to be succeeded by Sherman when Grant was made general-in-chief, and everything went on to victory—Chattanooga, the relief of Knoxville, Nashville, the March to the Sea, and the surrender of Johnston's army in North Carolina.

In all of this it does not appear that Lincoln took an active part. To Halleck before or after Shiloh, or Corinth, to Grant before or after Vicksburg, to Buell on his retreat to Louisville, Lincoln's despatches are few in number, and give little in the way of instruction or even suggestion, except to reiterate his opinion that east Tennessee should be occupied. A telegram to Buell, dated October 19, 1862, signed by Halleck, but sent by the President's order and evidently in Lincoln's own words, contains this imperative command, "Your army must enter east Tennessee this fall."

Not being heeded, Buell was superseded by Rosecrans ten days later. To Rosecrans, after he had succeeded Buell, Lincoln sent several despatches, first congratulating him on his victory at Stone River in January, 1863, then gently chiding him for his complaining telegrams, subsequently suggesting that he attack Bragg in order to prevent re-enforcements being sent to Johnston, and finally, when Rosecrans was overwhelmed at Chickamauga and shut up in Chattanooga, sending him encouraging and cheering telegrams. But, except for his never-failing insistence that east Tennessee be held, none of these despatches contain the closely reasoned thoughts which are found in his earlier communications to McClellan. The period of Rosecrans's command was coincident with that of Hooker and Meade in the East—the same period of the Emancipation Proclamation and the draft riots to which reference has already been made.

On the 29th of February, 1864, Congress passed an act reviving the grade of lieutenant-general in the army, and within a few days Grant was appointed and confirmed to this office. On March 10 he was "by Executive Order assigned to command the Armies of the United States." It is stated in Nicolay and Hay that Lincoln neither advocated nor opposed this legislation. The bill was introduced by E. B. Washburne, Member of Congress from the Galena district in Illinois, an old political friend of Lincoln and a great admirer of Grant. Just why Lincoln was neutral in the matter does not appear. An ungracious comment in Nicolay and Hay reads as follows: "Whether he was or was not the ablest of all our generals is a question which can never be decided. . . . Grant was, beyond all comparison, the most fortunate of American soldiers." There are no facts whatever to justify this depreciation. Grant owed his success solely to his clear-sighted appreciation of facts and to the tremendous energy and resourcefulness with which he carried his plans into effect—as Sheridan expresses it, to "the manifold resources of his well-balanced military mind."

Grant was ordered to Washington to receive his commission, and met Lincoln for the first time on March 8, 1864. Grant

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says in his "Memoirs" that both Stanton and Halleck cautioned him against giving the President his plans of campaign because Lincoln was "so kind-hearted that some friend would be sure to get from him all he knew"—a piece of advice which, in view of Lincoln's discretion and Grant's reticence, seems quite superfluous. Grant's only comment is that the President did not ask him for his plans nor did he communicate them to him—nor to Stanton or Halleck. Lincoln said to him that "all he wanted or ever had wanted was some one who would take the responsibility and act, and call on him for all the assistance needed," and he "pledged himself to use all the power of the government in rendering such assistance." In short, Lincoln believed that at last he had found the man competent to command the armies, and he promptly retired to the background, limiting his military activities to the still mighty task of giving Grant the full support of the government in every branch.

With the comprehensive, far-reaching, and correlated plans which Grant made in April, 1864, and with the manner in which he carried them out, it is not possible to speak here in detail. We are dealing only with Lincoln's relation to them. On the 30th of April, four days before Grant crossed the Rapidan, Lincoln wrote to Grant, "Not expecting to see you again before the spring campaign opens, I wish to express in this way my entire satisfaction with what you have done up to this time, so far as I understand it. The particulars of your plans I neither know nor seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and, pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you. . . . If there is anything wanting which is within my power to give, do not fail to let me know it. And now with a brave army and a just cause, may God sustain you." The terrible fighting in the Wilderness followed, and on the day of Cold Harbor (June 3) Lincoln, in declining an invitation to attend a mass meeting in New York, wrote to the presiding officer, "My previous high estimate of General Grant has been maintained and heightened by what has occurred in the remarkable campaign he is now conducting, while the magnitude and difficulty of the task before him do not prove less than I expected."

Grant telegraphed almost daily to Halleck, and Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, was at Grant's head-quarters, and, with the trained skill of a journalist, was sending almost hourly telegrams to Stanton. But Lincoln answered only once. At 7 A. M. on June 15 he saw Grant's telegram to Halleck, sent from Bermuda Hundred the previous day, saying, "Our movement from Cold Harbor to the James River has been made with great celerity and so far without loss or accident." Then Lincoln sent this cheery message, "I begin to see it. You will succeed. God bless you all."

But when Early was approaching Washington on July 9, Grant telegraphed Halleck that if the President desired him to come to Washington in person he could "leave everything here on the defensive" and come on an hour's notice. Lincoln replied the following day, explaining what Halleck told him about the small force available for the defence of Washington and Baltimore, and adding, "Now, what I think is, that you should provide to retain your hold where you are, certainly, and bring the rest with you personally, and make a vigorous effort to destroy the enemy's forces in this vicinity. I think there is really a fair chance to do this, if the movement is prompt. This is what I think upon your suggestion, but it is not an order." But late that night Grant replied to Lincoln telling him what troops he had sent to Washington and said: "I think, on reflection, it would have a bad effect for me to leave here. . . . I have great faith that the enemy will never be able to get back with much of his force," and Lincoln replied, "Very satisfactory." But the pursuit of Early was feeble and he remained in the Shenandoah Valley. Grant then sent Sheridan to Washington and told Halleck (August 1), "I want Sheridan put in command of all the troops in the field, with instructions to put himself south of the enemy, and follow him to the death. Wherever the enemy goes, let our troops go also." Lincoln saw this despatch, and immediately sent Grant this characteristic reply: "This, I think, is exactly right as to how our forces should move; but please look over the despatches you may have received from here, even since you made that order, and discover, if

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you can, that there is any idea in the head of any one here of 'putting our army south of the enemy,' or of following him to the 'death' in any direction. I repeat to you, it will neither be done nor attempted, unless you watch it every day and hour, and force it." This was savage language for a gentle President to use about his own Secretary of War and Chief of Staff, but doubtless it was deserved. Grant's answer, the same day, was brief, "I will start in two hours for Washington and will spend a day or two with the army under General Hunter." He did not, however, go to Washington, but went direct to General Hunter's headquarters at Monocacy, relieved Hunter, telegraphed Sheridan to join him at once, and on Sheridan's arrival placed him in command. Grant met Sheridan at the station and remained only long enough to give him his orders, and then returned to Petersburg in order to attack Lee and prevent reinforcements being sent to Early. The result was Sheridan's brilliant campaign in the Shenandoah Valley and his complete defeat of Early's army two months later.

In all this how similar are Lincoln's despatches to those he had sent in the previous years to McClellan and Meade and Halleck and Buell, and how different the result! And what hearty support on Lincoln's part is shown in this despatch of August 17 to Grant, "I have seen your despatch expressing your unwillingness to break your hold where you are. Neither am I willing. Hold on with a bulldog grip, and chew and choke as much as possible."

Sheridan's campaign in the valley was, however, no holiday affair, and on two occasions in September Lincoln telegraphed to Grant expressing his anxiety. The second despatch, September 29, is very characteristic—"I hope it will have no constraint on you, nor do harm anyway, for me to say I am a little afraid lest Lee sends re-enforcements to Early, and thus enable him to turn upon Sheridan." To which Grant replied the same afternoon, "I am taking steps to prevent Lee sending re-enforcements to Early by attacking him here." The result was a two days' battle, Fort Harrison on the right and Poplar Spring Church on the left—names almost forgotten in the almost continuous fighting around Petersburg, but involving a loss of more than 6,200 men on these two days.

And so the death struggle around Petersburg continued during the winter, to end at Appomattox in the spring. To Grant, Lincoln sent no military despatches subsequent to the one of September 29, above quoted. To Sherman he sent nothing except a warm-hearted, generous, and most flattering message of congratulations when his March to the Sea terminated at Savannah; to Thomas, only a similar but more guarded telegram after the battle of Nashville; to Banks, a message in December, 1864, refusing to grant an important request of Banks's because "he whom I must hold responsible for military results is not agreed"; to the other generals, nothing at all except on civil matters. But if Lincoln abstained from suggestions on purely military movements, he never for an instant relaxed his grasp of supreme control of the military situation. There is an imperative tone in his despatch to Grant of February 1—at the time the Confederate Peace Commissioners had reached Grant's headquarters—"Let nothing which is transpiring change, hinder, or delay your military movements or plans"; and again on March 3, when Stanton sent this telegram, "The President directs me to say that he wishes you to have no conference with General Lee unless it be for capitulation of General Lee's army, or on some minor or purely military matter. He instructs me to say that you are not to decide, discuss, or confer upon any political questions. Such questions the President holds in his own hands, and will submit them to no military conferences or conventions. Meanwhile, you are to press to the utmost your military advantages." Grant welcomed such instructions which defined his duties so clearly, and he carried them out in letter and spirit, assuring Stanton "that no act of the enemy will prevent me from pressing all advantages gained to the utmost of my ability. Neither will I, under any circumstances, exceed my authority, or in any way embarrass the government." It was a grave oversight on the part of Lincoln, Stanton, and Grant that no copy of these explicit instructions of March 3 were sent to Sherman, then commanding a separate army in North Carolina and liable at any moment to be confronted with the problem of what terms of surrender he should offer Johnston. That Sherman made a mistake

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when the contingency of Johnston's surrender arrived, after Lincoln's death, is universally conceded; but neither Lincoln, Stanton, nor Grant can escape their share of responsibility for it, in not sending him the same positive directions that were sent to Grant.

In January, 1865, Lincoln wrote to Grant a most delightfully courteous and modest letter in regard to his son Robert, then twenty-two years old, recently graduated from Harvard, and desirous "to see something of the war before it ends. . . . Could he, without embarrassment to you or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious and as deeply interested that you shall not be encumbered as you can be yourself." Grant instantly replied, "I will be most happy to have him in my military family in the manner you propose," and suggested that he be given the rank of captain. He was accordingly appointed captain and aide-de-camp, and joined Grant on February 21. This circumstance—and perhaps others—led Grant to send a telegram to Lincoln on March 20: "Can you not visit City Point for a day or two? I would like very much to see you, and I think the rest will do you good." Lincoln accepted the invitation and arrived on March 24. He remained at City Point, living on the steamer *River Queen*, fourteen days, until Friday, April 7. He had long talks with Grant; he visited the troops, saw a battle in progress, met General Sherman and Admiral Porter, who came to consult Grant, entered Richmond on April 4. Nicolay and Hay speak of his "enjoying what was probably the most satisfactory relaxation in which he had been able to indulge during his whole Presidential service."

On March 29 Grant started with his army on the Appomattox campaign. He kept Lincoln well advised by telegrams of

the progress of events, and Lincoln answered him: "Having no great deal to do here, I am sending the substance of your despatches to the Secretary of War." Lincoln, in fact, turned correspondent, and every day for a week reported to Stanton the progress of the day's battle or march—short, but clear, incisive despatches, giving a distinct account of what was happening. On the 7th of April Lincoln started down the James River on his return to Washington. But early in the morning he received a telegram sent by Grant about midnight repeating Sheridan's report of the battle of Burkesville, April 6. Sheridan concluded with the words: "If the thing is pressed, I think Lee will surrender." Lincoln answered Grant at 11 A. M. April 7, "Gen. Sheridan says, 'If the thing is pressed, I think that Lee will surrender.' Let the *thing* be pressed." Lincoln then proceeded to Washington. It was his last military order. Eight days later he was dead.

As time goes on Lincoln's fame looms ever larger and larger. Great statesman, astute politician, clear thinker, classic writer, master of men, kindly, lovable man. These are his titles. To them must be added—military leader. Had he failed in that quality, the others would have been forgotten. Had peace been made on any terms but those of surrender of the insurgent forces and restoration of the Union, his career would have been a colossal failure and the Emancipation Proclamation a subject of ridicule. The prime essential was military success. Lincoln gained it. Judged in the retrospect of nearly half a century, with his every written word now in print and with all the facts of the period brought out and placed in proper perspective by the endless studies, discussions, and arguments of the intervening years, it becomes clear that first and last and at all times during his Presidency, in military affairs his was not only the guiding but the controlling hand.

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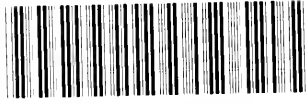


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